

Shantideva continues by telling the story of a celestial being in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three who one week before he died suffered great misery when he encountered the five omens of his impending death. The flowers that naturally adorned his body began to wilt, his clothes became old and started to smell, his body started to age, he developed a strong dislike of the place he had been living, and he had a premonition of where he would be reborn in his next life. Regarding the latter omen, he saw that he was about to be born as a pig and became extremely worried and fearful. Indra, the foremost god of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, came to know of the celestial being's misery and advised him to take refuge in the Three Jewels. The celestial being was so terrified of being born as a pig that he took particularly sincere refuge, as a result of which he was not born as a pig but in Tushita pure realm.

When Indra found about this he spoke the following verse that is cited in the *Compendium of Trainings (Siksa-samuccaya)*:

*Those who take refuge  
Do not go to the miserable realms.  
After giving up their human forms  
They assume the bodies of celestial beings.*

4. **You accumulate vast merit** and
5. **You will not fall into the miserable realms**

These were explained before.

6. **You will not be thwarted by human and non-human hindrances**

When we sincerely and continuously take refuge in the Three Jewels we generate inner peace. Hence to the extent that we have conquered the inner hindrances we cannot be harmed by external obstacles created by humans and non-humans anymore. This is explained in a sutra:

<i>People who are terrified Mostly take refuge in deities of the Mountains, forests, temples, And the trees of sacred places.</i>	<i>Such refuges are not foremost; Such refuges are not supreme. If you rely on such a refuge, You will not be freed of all suffering.</i>
<i>When you take refuge in the Buddha, The teaching, and the community, You will see with wisdom The four noble truths –</i>	<i>Suffering, the origin of suffering, Correctly overcoming suffering, And the happy eightfold noble paths Leading to Nirvana.</i>
<i>This is the foremost refuge; This is the supreme refuge. If you rely on such a refuge, You will be freed from all suffering.</i>	

Also, Lama Tsongkhapa says that on this occasion we should reflect on the tale of man who mastered a magic rope. The tale is about a non-Buddhist who practised black magic and attained the supernatural power to capture people with a special rope, called a wind lasso. He could throw the rope a long distance and catch anybody. However, he was unable to catch a boy who motivated by great fear and deep faith took refuge in the Three Jewels.

7. **You will accomplish everything you wish**

If we sincerely take refuge and make requesting prayers, we can accomplish quickly and easily any task we wish to accomplish.

8. **You will quickly achieve Buddhahood**

Taking refuge is one of the essential causes that result in our future enlightenment. However, that does not mean that merely taking refuge is sufficient to become a Buddha. It rather provides the necessary groundwork, for it provides us with the conditions conducive to practising the Dharma. It provides us with a precious human body on the basis of which we gradually reduce our negative qualities and build up our positive qualities. In this way we reach different spiritual levels until eventually we are able to overcome even the subtlest shortcomings and attain the fully enlightened state of a Buddha.

This completes the description of the benefits of taking refuge. Having understood and contemplated those, we should take heartfelt refuge three times in the morning and three times in the evening. In order to help us to take refuge mentally we could verbally recite the Refuge & Bodhicitta Prayer we chant before class. However, at that time we need to be mindful not merely to recite the words but to concentrate on their meaning.

**f) Maintain your refuge and do not forsake the three Jewels, even in jest or at the cost of your life**

Taking refuge and maintaining our faith in the Three Jewels are more important and more valuable than anything we possess; they are even more valuable than our own life. One day we inevitably have to leave behind this life; we have to leave behind our body, possessions, our family, partner, friends, and so on. Therefore, we should never forsake the Three Jewels, since only the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha can actually provide us with what we long for the most – lasting happiness. We should not give up our refuge even at the cost of our life, and we should certainly not joke about doing so.

This completes the general precepts which relate to the Three Jewels in general (see Handout 22, page 1). Some former teachers maintain that there is another precept that requires practitioners, depending on what direction they are going in, to take refuge in one of the Tathagathas of the Five Buddha Lineages. The five Tathagathas are traditionally arrayed with Akshobya in the east, Ratnasambhava in the south, Amitabha in the west, Amoghasiddhi in the north, and Vairochana in the centre. Therefore, according to this tradition when one goes to the east one should take refuge in Akshobya, and so forth. However, Lama Tsongkhapa says that he has not seen any scriptural source for this precept. Furthermore Lama Tsongkhapa explains that the source for his presentation of the general precepts is Atisha's *Commentary on the Difficult Points of the "Path to Enlightenment"*. The three proscriptive precepts of the six special precepts which relate to each of the Three Jewels separately (see Handout 20, page 1) are explained in the sutras. The three prescriptive precepts of the six special precepts (see Handout 20, page 2) are from Vimalamitra's *Six Aspects for Taking Refuge (sad-anga-sarana-gamana)*:

*An image, verse, or  
Discarded scrap of yellow cloth:  
Out of faith and belief, consider it to be the Teacher;  
Do not mistakenly deny anything he said,  
Rather place it on the crown of your head.  
View pure and impure persons  
As though they were noble.*

Lama Tsongkhapa then continues to explain the criteria for forfeiting our refuge. When we transgress some of these precepts we do not necessarily lose our refuge but weaken it. However, there are other precepts that when violated actually cause us to forfeit our refuge so that we are not Buddhists anymore. Even though there are different opinions as to what these precepts are, according to Lama Tsongkhapa's position, when we transgress the precept to *maintain our refuge and to not forsake the Three Jewels even in jest or at the cost of our life*, we lose our refuge. Furthermore, we also forfeit it when, without forsaking the Three Jewels, we rely on a teacher, a teaching, etc. that contradict the Three Jewels because we transgress the precept to *refrain from taking refuge in gods*, and because we are not fully entrusting ourselves in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Breaking any of the other precepts constitutes merely the degeneration or weakening of our refuge but does not cause us to lose it.

Lastly someone asks the question of how the Three Jewels protect us. Lama Tsongkhapa replies that they do not actually protect us in the sense that when we pray to them they remove our problems and difficulties. It is rather that we have to rely on the Buddha and the Sangha to teach us the Dharma. The Dharma Jewel is the actual refuge, for when we practise the Dharma it enables us to protect ourselves. Therefore, the protection the Three Jewels provide is something that we create. We have the power to protect ourselves, and if we are unable to build up such a protection, there is nothing outside that can save us.

This completes the presentation of the three objects of refuge.

